

SPONSA RECIS



A SPIRITUAL REVIEW
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SPONSA REGIS

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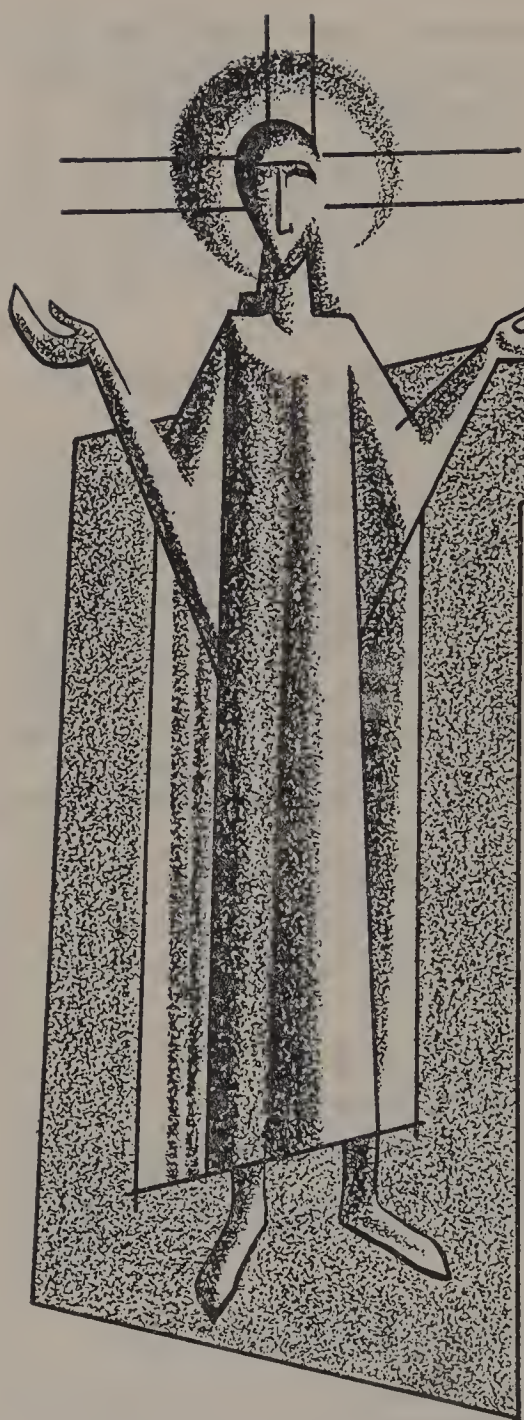
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*The Parables of Jesus*¹

Francis L. Filas, S.J.
Chicago, Illinois

ONE OF THE most puzzling expressions in the parables of Jesus is His use of the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven." It is puzzling, that is, to readers who do not know what it meant to Jesus and to His countrymen. Taken in the background of contemporary Jewish customs and ways of speaking, it can become reasonably clear even to us who are removed from Jesus' homeland and times by thousands of miles and years.

The first thing to notice is that Matthew's gospel regularly uses the term "Kingdom of Heaven" where Luke and Mark employ "Kingdom of God." Both phrases mean the same thing, but since Matthew was writing for a predominantly Jewish audience, he adapted himself to the Jewish custom of reverent reticence in the use of the name of God. This reverence led to the substitution of circumlocutions or other titles of God in order to avoid pronouncing the august name.

Luke and Mark wrote for gentile converts interested in or already members of Christianity. Hence, they expressed Jesus' idea in terms which their readers could understand: "Kingdom of God." The words which Jesus Himself originally used must have been "Kingdom of Heaven," since He logically accommodated Himself to the religious customs of His time.

This explanation removes at its root the confusion of the modern Christian who hears the parables from the pulpit and reads them in his missal, wondering all the time how "Kingdom of Heaven" can be understood in terms of the "Heaven" that is the place of eternal happiness with God. How, indeed, can the "Kingdom of Heaven" in this sense grow like a mustard seed? Or contain good and bad fishes which will be sorted out in the end? Or grow both genuine wheat mixed with counter-

¹ This article is part of a book, *The Parables of Jesus*, to be published on March 10 by The Macmillan Company. New Testament quotations are from the Spencer Version.

feit weed? The answer is simple. If we still wish to interpret "Heaven" in this sense of eternal reward, we can always think of the spiritual kingdom on earth that *prepares* for Heaven. This is truly the kingdom of God—first, militantly fighting the battle against evil and the powers of darkness, and then ultimately by God's grace triumphing in the attainment of eternal joy. Truly, too, the kingdom of God on earth becomes the kingdom of eternal life in Heaven by anticipation.

Yet we must emphasize that this particular meaning was not at the heart of Christ's words. He was speaking to a people whose religious tradition had been steeped in the fact that they had been chosen by God for a divine mission. Temporarily, so they believed, the power and the glory of ancient Israel had left them, but eventually this power and glory would return. They were correct in looking forward to the Messiah, the Anointed One, as the representative of God who would rule this new kingdom, but their interpretation fell short of its ideal goal when the kingdom of God's power came to be anticipated in a purely earthly sense. They expected a return of military might and political dominion over other nations. Incidentally, the title "Christ" is merely the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Anointed One" or Messiah. It signified a king, a priest, and a prophet.

We must keep in mind that Jesus was dealing with a very delicate situation. On the one hand He wished to retain and deepen the already strong tradition of God's forthcoming ambassador. With equal vigor Jesus had to protect His message of the kingdom from a temporal and merely earthly interpretation. Humanly speaking (and setting aside for the moment the possibility of miraculous intervention), our Lord's teaching mission would have been cut short if He had allowed the people to think of Him as a political visionary. The resultant revolt and inevitable suppression by Roman authorities would have hindered Him from promulgating the new law of love before His time of apparent defeat was to come.

Moreover, for the sake of truth itself, it was even more important that Jesus' message be properly understood. He had come on this earth to establish a kingdom, but it was to be a kingdom of deep faith in the word of God, of unshak-

able hope amid earthly misfortune, and mainly of active love of God and man. The kingdom of God on earth was to exist amid those circumstances in which the will of God would be ideally obeyed. To convey His message in a gentle yet effective manner, Jesus used the deliberately gradual and somewhat obscure method of teaching the nature of the kingdom by means of His parables.

THE TREASURE

Matthew 13:44

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure buried in the field, which a man finds and covers up; and in his delight goes and sells all he possesses, and buys that field."

One sentence is sufficient to sketch a picture illustrating the value of spiritual riches. A man finds a treasure in a field. This discovery was in all likelihood a chest filled with gold, silver, or bronze. Jesus' hearers were well aware that the troubled times of their country led to a practice of burying precious objects until such time as the owner could possess them in safety. We are not told, for the parable is not interested in the detail, precisely how the find was made—whether by a chance plowman or by some other person digging in the field. At any rate the laborer sells all he has in order to buy the field and with it the treasure (which he had covered up). He does all this in sheer delight and with no thought of the sacrifice needed to gain the one thing on which he has set his heart.

The lesson of the parable is in general quite clear. The kingdom of Heaven and its spiritual values are so precious that anyone who realizes their unbelievable worth will gladly sacrifice every worldly possession, every worldly attachment, in order to obtain the spiritual treasure that surpasses all else.

But if the lesson is clear, the parable none the less has carried with it an apparent implicit moral difficulty. Was Jesus praising the deceitful action of the finder, who purchased the field at a low price which was basically unjust, because he knew what the field actually contained? This objection does not hold true, in the first place, as far as Christ's

praise might be concerned. The reason is that the parable concentrates on the one lesson of sacrificing all lesser goods in order to obtain what one has realized is the greatest good. The question of the justice of buying the field is a literary detail outside the purview of the parable.

Secondly, perhaps the finder should not be called unjust after all. If he had been a common thief, he would have removed the treasure stealthily under cover of night. Instead, he was honest enough to give the owner what the owner wished to receive for his parcel of land. By our judgment on his conduct he may have acted unjustly according to present-day standards, but while being less perfect he was not in the wrong according to the ancient outlook on a case of this sort. None the less, the parable certainly does not sanction deceit in business transactions whereby hidden defects or enormous values would deliberately be concealed.

Jesus applied the parable to the transcendent values of the kingdom of Heaven. We can understand, therefore, how later commentators have extended this application to any part of the kingdom, so that one becomes eager to sacrifice each and every worldly value for the supreme spiritual treasures of the doctrine of the Church, the appreciation of the Holy Eucharist, or the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:45-46

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; who, having found a single pearl of great value, went and sold all he possessed and bought it."

In another sentence-parable Jesus masterfully compresses a powerful lesson. Again a treasure is at stake, but this time the treasure is not found by accident. It has been deliberately sought by an expert who travels far and wide "in search of fine pearls." He sells all he has in order to buy the pearl he desires. In the same way the spiritual treasures of the kingdom can be deliberately sought by one who earnestly desires to know God's will and to follow it out perfectly. To do God's will, all else, even his own self-will, is to be given up without a thought of regret.

The merchant of this parable has at times been criticized, as if he were greedy for gain by purchasing the pearl. The story Jesus tells does not, however, suggest in the slightest that the man bought the pearl in fraud or that he intended to sell it at great profit. Instead, as an artist of his trade he wishes to own the pearl for its own sake.

We might well note that in the application of this parable the complete self-renunciation symbolized by the merchant does not mean necessarily a drastic and dreadful life of austerity. Centuries of Christian interpretation based on "Blessed are the poor in spirit" have laid emphasis on the interior spirit of renunciation as the essential of renunciation for Christ. A spirit of detachment is therefore what is needed. If and when the demands of duty or generosity in carrying out God's will call for dying to one's selfishness (for that is the meaning of mortification), the scale of values applied by the pearl merchant will hold true even more strongly.

THE SEED GROWING QUIETLY

Mark 4:26-29

He said, moreover, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth yields crops of its own accord; first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the crop is ripe, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

This parable is found only in the gospel of Mark. We notice at the outset that Mark, writing for a gentile audience probably at Rome, speaks of the Church of Christ as the "Kingdom of God" instead of the "Kingdom of Heaven." As mentioned earlier, Mark has put Jesus' words into the non-Semitic expression so that they would be better understood.

The kingdom, the parable says, is like seed cast into the ground. A notable phrase then occurs. While the sower would "sleep and rise night and day," the seed would sprout and grow, "*he knows not how.*" After the earth has matured its crops of its own accord, the sower puts in his

sickle because the time for harvest has arrived.

We might think at first sight that this parable merely repeats the lesson, for example, of the leaven, which permeates the mass of dough silently yet effectively. However, the new element introduced here is the interior process of growth. Applied to Christ, who is evidently the sower, the parable means that He begins His Church, and then lets it continue more or less by human means, with His visible presence no longer helping it. In any event His terrestrial kingdom as Messiah will not be perfectly realized at once, despite the fond hopes of the disciples who mistakenly looked forward to the utter rout of the foreign Roman rulers. Only at the end of time will Jesus return to reap the harvest of the kingdom in which He has so much interest. Implicitly, therefore, Jesus as the founder of the kingdom is claiming the divine authority of conducting the harvest, the Last Judgment.

It would be absurd were we to apply *all* the details of the narrative to the divine sower. As God, He certainly does not sleep and rise from His work. Most of all, His spiritual harvest does not develop in a way unknown to Him and outside His control.

The present parable does not mean that once we have begun a project, we should let matters take their course without our constant watchfulness. Such an attitude would be one of undue presumption, a failure to take the necessary natural means which God in His providence wishes us to use.

In a spiritual sense the parable can be a source of encouragement not only for the spiritual shepherds of Christ's Church but also for all who work in any way to spread Christ's kingdom. Our labors of helping to sow Christ's word have a certain automatic effect or culmination. Despite the fact that we perceive no visible effects in every case, the spiritual harvest quietly ripens independently of our efforts. We might remind ourselves in this connection, therefore, that our sowing of the seed is all that we do. Someone else will water it, and God alone will give the increase.

It is interesting to note the botanical observations Jesus has added for His listeners, folk who knew the growing of grain so well: "first the blade, then the ear, then the full

grain in the ear." Need we remark again that the parable does not apply these picturesque steps of growth to the kingdom? It would be only in an extended sense, as a subjective interpretation, if we were to claim that a particular century in the history of the Church represents the blade; another century, the ear; and still another, the end to come. Such a claim would be contrary to Christ's teaching in so far as He steadfastly refused to give any hint when the end of the world will come. Apart from statements veiled in the obscurity of prophetic figures, His reply to all such queries was the admonition to watch and be ready for His coming.

"Temptation" vs. Consent

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THAT INNER EXPERIENCE known as "temptation" occasionally usurps the attention of most persons, religious included, as they travel the course of normal, adult life. A properly informed and self-understanding religious realizes that this experience, even if intense and frequent, is utterly normal, natural, no cause for disturbance in one's spiritual and moral life with Christ.

Such a religious recognizes, moreover, that such inner experiences can proceed, even with great vigor, without in any way being willed. These experiences naturally involve at least some degree of emotional impact—sometimes a rather intense degree—and for that very reason the question of consent may be difficult for some persons. Hence it may prove of value to refresh one's notions concerning consent to the presence of

these undeniable, unavoidable experiences.¹ The present article is to be presented in two sections, in successive issues of this magazine.

The aim here is not at all to assist a religious to decide if serious sin has been committed; the aim rather is to consider the reasons for peace of mind and soul in this matter. The aim is to assist in strengthening a calm understanding of and a serene union with Christ-within amidst one of life's routine experiences. Certainly that which is routine should not be truly disquieting.

A professional textbook for medical students states that "It cannot be overemphasized that psychogenic processes related to the female sex sphere *originate entirely independent of the patient's will*."² "Psychogenic processes," (that is, thoughts and emotions of a sexual sort) do not derive from some element of human nature which is corrupt or from some inborn genius for evil. Such feelings and emotions arise naturally, independent of the will. True, unlawful experiences or careless reading in the past will possibly enhance the intensity of feelings today (and foolish reading now may well enkindle such feelings), but the real source lies in the normal functioning of a normal, feminine nature — of which a woman should always be proud, not regretful. These feelings, sometimes vague, sometimes most specific, have much in common with other human feelings, especially in their capacity to proceed blithely in one direction while the person's will determinedly strides in a contrary direction. Despite the familiarity of this experience some examples may serve to sharpen this fact in mind.

Suppose the President in Washington has strenuously opposed a proposed law all the while that Congress debates it, and finally votes it through. The bill comes to the President's desk for his official signature. Quietly muttering to himself that this particular bill is ridiculous, nevertheless, pen in hand,

¹ Cf. *Sponsa Regis*, February, 1958, "Reflections & Counsels on Chastity," by the same author, for a discussion of the physiological and psychological origin of "temptations." The present article expands & elaborates certain notions presented there, and presumes a familiarity with that material. Available in reprint from the Liturgical Press.

² *Integrated Gynecology*, Rubin & Novak, vol. 3, McGraw-Hill, 1956. p. 67. Italics added.

Mr. President signs. Wrathful, muttered feeling to the contrary notwithstanding, the bill becomes a law because of the presidential signature. His feelings went in one direction, strongly; yet it required an act of the will to pick up the pen, sit down, pull the hated paper to his writing position, and scrawl the official signature across the line. He refused to *consent* to his feelings boiling within, real as they were, and he signed.

Again, in World War II, 1943, on New Georgia Island in the steamy south Pacific, Pvt. Roger Young of Tiffin, Ohio, deliberately, and singlehandedly, stormed an enemy machine-gun team. Destroying the enemy, losing his own life instantly, he thereby freed eighteen of his comrades who were trapped by the fire of that gun. His action was deliberate, not impulsive, as his posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor citation states. His feelings: fear, hatred of death, a wish that someone else would go out to destroy the enemy. His act: a free choice of a hero's martyrdom. He refused to *consent* to his own feelings, clearly showing that feelings and will can simultaneously move in contrary directions.

And again: in Paul Horgan's lovely novelette, *One Rose for Christmas*,³ Mother Seraphim finds her heart plagued with bitter feelings toward her prime problem child among the orphans, Kathie. When, as the plot unfolds, she is stunned to discover that God has seemingly used this unlikely creature to bestow an immense blessing on her, humbly she ignores her long irritation with the child, mounts the stairway late that night, arouses the sleeping youngster, bundling her off to the kitchen where a midnight cocoa snack is shared. (Mother Seraphim, the author carefully notes, was superior.)

These three illustrations show human feelings traveling in one direction, the will in another. Notice, feelings were not stifled, eliminated, or bluntly killed, but in the action taken by the President, Roger Young, and Mother Superior with her cocoa, the evidence was plain that the will surmounted the feelings, not surrendering to them, not *consenting* to them. A bill became true law, comrades were actually saved, and a child was belatedly treated at midnight—all despite strong

³ *Humble Powers*, three novelettes by Paul Horgan, Image Books (Doubleday Doran), New York, 1954.

feelings to the contrary. Feelings and will differ vastly. It is important to have confidence in this psychological fact. Awareness of feelings is one thing; consent to these feelings, and any action they propose, is vastly different indeed — as far apart as ocean and sky, which on the horizon only *seem* to come together!

Consider another factor: our interior sluggishness of mind and will, especially observable when we strive to focus attention on one thought while a distracting thought lurks nearby. Sister Mary Ph.D. sits down to study at her summer school desk, and finds herself pondering instead a problem in last April's school play. Sister Mystica kneels to meditate, but gets involved instead in mental argument with the plumber. Both Sisters briskly return mentally to the situation at hand, study and prayer respectively, but those auditorium curtains open once again — the plumber answers back. Another effort, another partial success only. And so on.

The mind and will are a haphazard pair, often as slippery and unpredictable as a pair of spaniel pups. Yet it is this same off-again on-again pair with which one must encounter the stubborn images and sensations sometimes produced by the mighty powers of the reproductive system. Is there any wonder that the very best, most utterly sincere efforts (and truly successful efforts in Christ's eyes) may *seem* as wavering as a youngster on her first ice skates (much good will and determination, but very slippery ice)?

Now the foregoing factors can be brought together and applied to the problem of distinguishing temptation from consent, mere awareness from approval. Discussed above were: (1) that images and even physical sensations of a sexual sort, called "temptations," can arise quite apart from the action of the will; (2) feelings, physical or emotional, can grow even while the will (unable to dispel them directly, but only capable of an attempt to ignore them) chooses an act contrary to that which the feelings crave; (3) the same mind and will, which concentrate often so sluggishly at prayer and study, naturally show a similar hit-and-miss efficiency in turning from "temptations."

On page 146, charted in parallel columns, full

awareness of temptation goes along simultaneously with a peaceful and altogether successful effort at refusal of consent, by quietly turning to other thoughts and acts. The chart presents a situation which continues for at least several moments, not merely a passing thought or sensation, easily ignored in its insignificance. In fact, the situation charted could conceivably continue over an extended, stubborn period of time.

The chart attempts to illustrate what the noted psychologist, Johann Lindworsky, has written:

"It is not as a rule sufficient to ward off a temptation only once. Mental images usually persist; i.e. they emerge again by themselves, especially when they — as is usual with sexual thoughts — are accompanied by organic sensations. Here help is found only in the repeated diversion of thought, insisted upon *with the greatest calmness*."⁴

Elsewhere he also comments that "no convulsive rejection of temptation is urged, but the calm and determined passing to another trend of thought."⁵ Let temptation be snubbed, not fought. Explosive "No's" only serve to startle some Sister lightly slumbering next door.

Careful attention is suggested to point no. 5 in the *Successful Resistance* column of the chart, a point of considerable importance in understanding that mere awareness of the pleasurable character of the temptation, in a certain way experiencing a real attraction toward it, *does not at all* constitute consent. Feelings and a decision rejecting consent can co-exist, each proceeding in a contrary direction, without vanquishing the feelings. The President, the Superior, and Roger Young have provided examples of this fundamental, deeply consoling truth of human nature.

The second, concluding section of this article, in the succeeding issue of *Sponsa Regis*, will focus further on the practical meaning of consent. If some of Christ's religious discover herein reasons for peace, replacing any former disquiet, these pages will be achieving their desired effect.

⁴ The Training of the Will, Lindworsky, S.J., Bruce, Milwaukee, 4th printing, 1955. p. 146. Italics added.

⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL & MORAL ANALYSIS OF "TEMPTATION"

(read left column down completely, then right)

Two parallel columns representing two parallel processes
occurring more or less simultaneously

AWARENESS	GAP	SUCCESSFUL RESISTANCE
(presenting EXPERIENCE IN IMAGINATION & IN NERVOUS - MUSCULAR SYSTEM:)	between awareness & consent	(presenting PEACEFUL, SUCCESSFUL EFFORT OF CHASTE MIND & WILL:)
1. Image —vivid images of forbidden acts become present — per- haps detailed — or mere vague sensations experienc- ed, vaguely or strongly	NO CONSENT	1.—mind becomes aware of fact that these images and/ or sensations are forbidden —therefore, inner attention is turned away—attempts to focus elsewhere
2. Experience —experience may seem as real as if one were actually in the situation imagined— or it may remain merely a vague persistent sensa- tion with no images	NO CONSENT	2.—mind, unnoticed & grad- ually, returns attention to inner experiences, again lingering over them, con- sidering them
3. Desire —a desire, possibly strong, to dwell on these thoughts —or a desire for continu- ance of the sensations	NO CONSENT	3.—after some moments, suddenly the sluggish mind becomes aware of itself at- tending to unlawful images and/or sensations; there- fore, #1 above is repeated
4. Physical Reaction —physical system (nervous- muscular) continues aware —reacts somewhat, produc- ing some pleasurable satis- faction, or even very much.	NO CONSENT	4.—#2 is repeated, and leads with some sluggish- ness to #1 again, etc., etc., etc.,
	NO CONSENT whatsoever	5.—Not at all necessary to try to deny that the images, of whatever actions or situa- tions, are genuinely attrac- tive to human nature's phys- ical desires, and are plea- sure-producing. In that re- spect, it's true that "I want" them, but I never approve, never cease the quiet ef- fort to distract myself.
		6.—however long this con- tinues, it is excellent ex- pression of chaste love for our Lord.

(to be concluded)

Liturgical Prayer (Continued)

John H. Miller, C.S.C.
Washington, D.C.

WHEN THE Holy See institutes a liturgical rite, she attaches to it a sacramental efficacy. It becomes the prayer of the whole Mystical Body produced by the power of the priesthood. It is, therefore, the prayer of Christ Himself. And Christ's prayer possesses a dignity far surpassing the prayer of any individual or group of individuals within the Church. The dignity of the liturgical prayer of the Church springs precisely from this sacramental and priestly quality, for when the Church, using the authority given her by Christ, makes something liturgical, she places it among the acts belonging to Christ's priesthood and gives to it all the power and efficacy of Christ's own prayer.

While Pius XII vindicates the dignity of all Christian prayer when he says: "No prayer, even the most private, lacks its own dignity and power, and all prayer is immensely helpful to the Mystical Body,¹ nevertheless the same Pope, both in *Mystici Corporis* and *Mediator Dei*, insists on the superior dignity of liturgical prayer. "Public prayer—prayers, that is, that are offered by Mother Church—because of the dignity of the Spouse of Christ, excel any other kind of prayer."² "Unquestionably, liturgical prayer, being the public supplication of the illustrious Spouse of Jesus Christ, is superior in excellence to private prayer."³

This has been the consistent teaching of theologians. I will quote but two. Dom Marmion, for instance, sees the ultimate basis for the excellence of liturgical prayer in the fact that it is a divine prayer, the prayer of the Word Himself, begun in the bosom of the Godhead and continued even on earth by the Church, His Spouse." The Word," he says, "is the Canticle

¹ *Mystici Corporis*, 105.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Mediator Dei*, 37.

that God inwardly sings to Himself, the Canticle that rises from the depths of the Divinity, the living Canticle wherein God eternally delights, because it is the infinite expression of His own perfection.”⁴

The Incarnation does not lessen the pleasure that God takes in the Canticle of the Word, but rather the infinite glorification of God continues through a Sacred Humanity. “This theandric (God-Man) activity remains that of a human nature, but it emanates from a Divine Person.”⁵ Its praises, therefore, while human in their expression, are divine in their agreeableness.

And the Mystical Body is the continuation of Christ. Before ascending into heaven, He gave to it His own power of adoring and praising the Father. This power is the priestly power exercised in the liturgy; “it is the praise of Christ, the Incarnate Word, passing through the lips of the Church.”⁶ Hence, the Divine Office is the voice of the Bride of Christ. “Such is the fundamental reason for the transcendency of the *Opus Dei*; such is the incommunicable and untransferable privilege attached to this prayer, the Work of God, accomplished with Christ, in His name, by the Church, His Bride.”⁷

Thus, when we recite the Divine Office we no longer go before God as private individuals, but as ambassadors of Christ’s Bride, officially invested with her dignity and power and with those of Christ Jesus Himself.⁸

To press his point, Marmion narrates an incident from the life of St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi. When one of her nuns asked permission to absent herself from choir so that she might give herself more completely to mental prayer, the Saint replied: “No, my daughter, I should certainly deceive you in giving you such a permission, for it would make you believe that this private devotion would honor God more and render you more pleasing to the Divine Majesty, while in comparison

⁴ Christ the Ideal of the Monk (St. Louis, 1926), p. 295.

⁵ Ibid., 296.

⁶ Ibid., 297.

⁷ Ibid., 398.

⁸ Ibid., 299.

with this public office which you sing together with your sisters, private prayer is but a small thing.”⁹

We might also cite the Dominican Hérís, who, in an article on the eminent dignity of liturgical prayer, says that since the prayer of the Church is but the continuation and extension of Christ’s prayer, it is a genuine priestly mediation between God and man. It is a prayer that participates in the priesthood of Christ and finds in this participation its genuine and authentic value of Christian intercession before God. Every Catholic possesses at least one priestly character (that of Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders). Hence, everything in liturgical prayer comes from Christ and passes through Christ to the Father. There are not two cults or two prayers: one of Christ and one of the Church. There is only one: that of Christ in which the Church shares through the power of priesthood.¹⁰

Therefore, we must say that liturgical prayer is infallibly acceptable and pleasing to Almighty God. This is what we mean by the dignity of liturgical prayer — not external style or solemnity, but rather the inner decorum or fitness of prayer that adequately honors God. And, as we said, the ultimate foundation for this tremendous dignity is that it is offered through the priesthood of Jesus Christ — a prayer, therefore, not of a human person, nor even of a human society, but of the Church as Christ’s mouthpiece. It is a prayer that is always, infallibly and infinitely pleasing to the Father.

With few exceptions theologians have generally attributed to the liturgy a greater efficacy and value in the spiritual life than any other religious exercise. The reasons for this are several; we shall speak, however, of four sources of this value.

The most basic reason for this greater value and efficacy of liturgical prayer is, again, the fact that it is offered by means of Christ’s priesthood and that the prayer is sacramental. Pius XII has this to say: “The worship rendered to God by the Church in union with her divine Head is the most efficacious means of achieving sanctity. This efficacy, where

⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁰ “L’émminente dignité de la prière de l’Eglise,” *Cours et Conférences des Semaines Liturgiques*, X (Louvain, 1932), 48-51.

there is question of the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments, derives first of all and principally *from the act itself (ex opere operato)*. But if one considers the part which the Immaculate Spouse of Jesus Christ (the Church) takes in the action, embellishing the sacrifice and sacraments with prayer and sacred ceremonies, or if one refers to the 'sacramentals' and the other rites instituted by the hierarchy of the Church, then its effectiveness is due rather *to the action of the Church (ex opere operantis Ecclesiae)*, inasmuch as she is holy and acts always in closest union with her Head."¹¹ "Sacraments and sacrifice do, then, possess that 'objective' power to make us really and personally sharers in the divine life of Jesus Christ."¹² Hence, the liturgy, as compared with the other exercises of the spiritual life, does possess the greater value precisely because, as the action of Christ and His Church, it has a greater intrinsic sanctifying power.

Besides this fundamental source of its sanctifying power, liturgical prayer possesses other qualities which further enhance its value. It is objective, organic and social. Let us investigate each of these qualities.

Since it is the corporate prayer of a community, the liturgy must be suitable to express the deepest religious sentiments of all the individuals who make up that community. It must be universally applicable; it must be, in other words, objective.

And the liturgy is such precisely because it is primarily directed, not by the religious experience of one or a few individuals, nor by feeling, but by thought. As Guardini says, "Only thought is universally current and consistent, and as long as it is really thought, remains suited, to a certain degree, to every intellect."¹³

Why is this true? The community is a mixed group whose different elements are motivated by varying emotions. Only objective truth is common to all. Now, the prayers of the liturgy are completely motivated and governed by dogma. After all, we call it the *lex credendi*, the norm of our faith. Under

¹¹ *Mediator Dei*, par. 26, 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³ *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York, 1953), 125.

the infallible guidance of the Roman Pontiffs, the entire liturgy has developed in faithful conformity to the teaching of the Church and thus has the Catholic faith for its content.¹⁴

This must not be understood in a purely negative sense; it is not enough that the liturgy avoid error. "It must also spring from the fulness of truth . . . and condense into prayer the entire body of religious truth."¹⁵ It cannot afford to stress any one mystery of faith in a manner calculated to satisfy purely temperamental and personal attractions. Hence, it protects man from narrowness and pettiness; it makes him free "as a preparation for the vastness of God's kingdom."¹⁶

In this way the liturgy can be said to be truly objective and universal. Thus, Dietrich von Hildebrand is able to say: "Because of this supra-individual stamp, its all-embracing breadth, the liturgy never violates the separate man's individuality. As for other prayers, it is always possible for them to bear an individual mark and for this reason they cannot be imposed on everybody without an unwarranted pressure. This can be true of the most beautiful prayers of some of the saints . . . to say nothing of certain hymns whose sentimental and trivial nature is a falsification of the spirit of Christ."¹⁷

And yet the liturgy does not allow her emphasis on thought "to degenerate into a frigid domination of reason."¹⁸ Rather it awakens those emotions that correspond to objective thought. That is why Guardini could say that the "liturgy is emotion, but it is emotion under the strictest control."¹⁹ It does not allow our emotions to run away with us, nor does it force us to expose our innermost selves and give up what is most intimately our own. Nor does it pressure us into modelling our interior along lines which are really foreign to us, adopting a plan of spiritual life which properly belongs to someone else, or living out of someone else's heart. This is the best safeguard against sentimentalism.

As a consequence of this the liturgy is interested

¹⁴ *Mediator Dei*, 45, 26.

¹⁵ Guardini, *op. cit.*, 126-127.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷ *Liturgy and Personality* (New York, 1943), 45.

¹⁸ Guardini, *op. cit.*, 128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

in forming within us the fundamental Christian temper, of transforming us gradually and organically into the likeness of Christ. It gives birth to a new life within us and nourishes this new creature in an atmosphere of simplicity and gentle development until it becomes, as Abbot Herwegen once expressed it, a living work of art before God, an object modelled according to the image of the eternal Logos.²⁰ In other words, it is not concerned with smothering the soul under a maze of clever introvert techniques, forced mortifications and manifold devotions. It wants the soul to grow and develop organically with everything in its place. As Guardini says, "the liturgy teaches the soul the grand manner of the Christian life."²¹

Finally, the liturgy offers our spiritual life the benefit of being social. Liturgical prayer is above all corporate prayer, and we have seen the most fundamental reason for this, our priestly and sacramental union with the entire Mystical Body. But the other quality of objectivity makes the soul more consciously become part of a higher unity. In this connection it would be well to quote von Hildebrand again. "It is a specifically liberal Protestant error to believe that the more a thing is peripheral, the more it leads towards the spirit of communion, and that, on the contrary, the deeper we are moved by something and the higher the value in question, the more we are plunged into solitude. The opposite is true. That which satisfies me alone, which bears only upon my own enjoyment, isolates. The world of objective values, on the contrary, unifies."²² It is precisely in the liturgy that we are made part of the entire Mystical Body at prayer and are fed with the objective truth common to all. Anchored in Christ and His truth, our union with one another approaches the incredible, because it is based on the genuine realities of the sacramental character of priesthood, sanctifying grace and the infused virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, entities which actually inhere in our soul!

This, then, is the wholly supernatural world of liturgical prayer. It is a prayer that is permeated through and through with Christ's power, His holiness and His truth. In a

²⁰ *The Art-Principle of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, 1931), 40-42.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, 200.

²² *Op. cit.*, 44.

word, it is a divine prayer. By way of summary, we might enlarge on the definition of the liturgy given by Pius XII. Liturgy is the public worship of the Mystical Body in the entirety of its Head and members, a worship that is common to all the members of the Mystical Body because it is the prayer and action of their Head, Christ; a divinely efficacious worship which brings about a holy exchange of God's life and human homage; worship, finally, which inserts Christ's members into the heavenly current of adoration, propitiation, thanksgiving and petition carried on by our glorified Savior, who stands before the throne of His Father, always ready to make intercession for us.

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We receive many requests from missionary Sisters and even Bishops for free subscriptions to *Sponsa Regis*. Some of these requests we ourselves are able to fill. But there are so many that we cannot possibly take care of them all. If each convent would adopt a missionary convent by sending in the price of a subscription (1 year: \$2.50; 2 years: \$4.00) the Sisters on the foreign missions would be most grateful.

Lent

*Roland Behrendt, O.S.B.
Collegeville, Minnesota*

POPE PIUS XII, in one of his last pronouncements to religious (April 3, 1958) wrote: "You all belong to the Church's school of sanctity. When there are no such schools, Christian life can rarely attain that full perfection which is rightly regarded as the mark of the Mystical Body of Christ in its present state. But in the various institutes of religious perfection this Christian life is fostered, grows, and shines forth brightly."

There is no better way to promote our perfection than the spirit of Lent. The Gregorian Sacramentary, which might well be attributed to Pope St. Gregory the Great himself (590-604), contains the following preface for Ash Wednesday whose thoughts and sentiments could carry us all through Lent, through the whole year to follow, through all our life.¹

It is truly fitting and just, right and proper for our salvation, that always and everywhere we should give thanks to You, O Holy Lord, Almighty Father, Eternal God, through Christ our Lord,

Who, having instituted this fast, kept it Himself for forty days and forty nights without partaking of food;

Whose hunger, even after these forty days, was not for the food of men but for the salvation of their souls;

Who did not long for the nourishment of men's bodies but rather for the holiness of their souls;

Who thrived on that food which is the redemption of all men and the love of their undivided hearts;

Who taught us not to be anxious for what is being

¹ Migne, P.L., 78, 57-58; cf. H. W. Wilson, *The Gregorian Sacramentary under Charles the Great*, Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. XLIX, London, 1915, p. 262. The writer acknowledges his debt of gratitude to the Benedictine nuns of Regina Laudis, Bethlehem, Connecticut, for having drawn his attention to this preface.

served at festive tables but for the harvest gleaned from our meditation on His sacred words in Holy Scripture;

Through whom the angels praise Your majesty and in whom the heavens and their powers join with the blessed seraphim in one joyful hymn of praise.

If we did not know it before, this preface tells us that fasting is not the only exercise imposed by Lent. The postcommunion prayer of the first Sunday in Lent begs that we may be cleansed from our old life and thus by our own Passover (Pasch) pass over into the participation of the mystery of our salvation. We suffer with Christ that we may also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17), and Christ did not suffer only in His body.

Religious life hardly can be lived on one consistently high level. It will have its ups and downs. Perhaps we have wondered why our past Lents, so full of good resolutions, have not borne more fruit. We have to make Lent a refresher course in our religious education in order that we might walk more worthily in the vocation to which we are called (Eph. 4:1). This ancient preface might well become our textbook.

Who, having instituted this fast, kept it Himself for forty days and forty nights, without partaking of food.

If we can make Christ's fast ours, His powers also will become ours. "The strength of Christ has created you; the weakness of Christ has re-created you. The power of Christ caused to exist what was not; the weakness of Christ has kept from perishing that which was. In His power He has formed us; in His weakness He has sought us" (St. Augustine, homily, Saturday of fourth week in Lent, Monastic Breviary).

From His weakness we can derive our strength. At Gethsemani and on the Cross He groaned — yet He accepted. We need not try to do better than He did. The painfulness of passing moments is overcome by hope. "Certain is the hope of promised happiness where there is participation in the sufferings of the Lord" (Pope St. Leo, Passion Sunday, second nocturn). And in that hope — since the fast is kept out of hope — we shall receive our reward (St. Augustine, homily, Ember Friday in Lent).

Christ instituted the fast — and kept it. No temptation of the devil could touch Him. For us, too, there is a constant war, and this is not a cold war. We did not embrace religious life in order to enjoy its privileges but in order to use them in the prosecution of a holy war. No neutrality is possible. We must either fight or become traitors. And this is no new war. It began in heaven when the angels fell, and on earth when Eve yielded to the serpent. Its final outcome will depend on our contribution to that sanctity of the Church of which Pope Pius XII spoke. None of us can be excused from this responsibility. We have to face the obligation; we have to see its reason.

Christ knew why He went into the desert. We, too, must know the reason for which, and the spirit in which, Lent is to be kept. The details of the observance count less. The most important question is not, 'How shall I do it?' but 'Why am I going to do it?'. Each of our religious practices and activities can be made a means to an end, and must contribute to that final end of ours which is to seek God. Lent has no meaning in itself. It is only a means, a way to an end, and this end is the glory of Easter.

And even after forty days His hunger was not for the food of men but for the salvation and holiness of their souls.

Lent is a time to strengthen the foundation of our spiritual life. Often the things of religion are looked upon as means to quench our hunger and thirst. But they really are meant to excite and increase it. They not only can lead us to, but actually can give us, what alone will satisfy: God. Attaining Him may cost a price, but a price which is still heavenly cheap in terms of the reward. "Let us offer ourselves, our very selves, to God, and we would offer our dearest and most pleasing riches. Let us return the image to the One whose image we are. Let us be as Christ, for Christ is also like us. (Gregory of Nazianzus, Easter Sunday, second nocturn, Monastic Breviary).

If we are like Christ, we will know no other motive power than His charity, and holiness will no longer be a problem. By charity we would not seek our own but that which relates to others (1 Cor. 13:5). Lent can make us see how we can

help the Lord to satisfy His hunger for the holiness and salvation of man. When the Lord died, He left His work unfinished that we might finish it. And our undivided charity will carry its own reward. Charity in Christ and love of God will return to its very source, will ascend to Him from whom it came and in whom it began before we even could attempt to love.

He thrived on that food which is the redemption of all men and the love of their undivided hearts.

Our running towards God is not simply a running to God; it is a becoming like God by which in doing good we become perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Though God wills our perfection, He also permits us to sin. He would not allow us to be sinners unless some good could be derived from our sins: the good of increased humility when we see our weakness; of truer self-knowledge when we learn to fathom our soul; of greater trust in His mercy when we realize His never-ending forgiveness. Much can be gained from making a mistake if we only can bring ourselves to learn. But we are slow in learning. Lent could be just this refresher course by which we make our past a lesson on which to build a better future. And failing again need not worry us. God does not expect perfection but infinite desire.

Perfection in this life consists in tending towards perfection, more in aiming at the ideal than in attaining it.

The obligations of Lent may seem startling and demanding. Although we are asked to avoid sin at all times, during Lent we are expected to follow a special program outlawing it completely. We are asked to refrain from sin. How can we expect to succeed when none of the saints would ever have dared to raise such a claim for himself? The question is not whether we can do it but whether we want to do it. We never will be better than we want to be. Our quite natural doubt whether we can succeed does not relieve us at all of the responsibility of trying. Try for one day—you might succeed. Try for another—you might succeed again. You might even succeed for forty days. After all, we are told that God's grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9). We have to sow now, during Lent, if we want to gather the harvest at Easter. And Easter

does not mean only that Easter when the deacon will chant the *Exultet* at the resurrection of the Lord. It means just as much that day, inevitable and certain, on which we ourselves will celebrate our own resurrection.

If we meet with difficulties, we need not be surprised. There is no real work which is not difficult and demanding. Lent is meant to be work and not a pastime. Energy and perseverance must be joined to desire. The redemption of all men and the love of their undivided hearts is to be the program of our Lent.

He taught us to be anxious not for what is being served at festive tables but for the harvest gleaned from our meditation on His sacred words in Holy Scripture.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that the preface to the Canon of the Ash Wednesday Mass refers to scriptural and spiritual reading and meditation. But this advice may well be the most important teaching of the preface and in some way furnishes the foundation, and sums up all that was said before.

St. Jerome has told us that to neglect Scripture is to neglect Christ. Bible means *the book*. In the early days, Scripture was called not only *biblos*, the book, but even *bibliotheca*, as if it were a whole library. But before it can be a book to be read, it is in the very first place a map we have to chart, so that we will know how to use it. To treat the Bible as any other book, to study it from the point of view of history or literature, would mean to ignore its purpose. It is not a book of science, properly speaking, but a book of that only science which counts, the science of love. Scripture teaches what God thinks and reveals of Himself, of His creation and of man as His child; what He commands and desires of us and what He promises in return. It is a primer of charity because God is charity. It is a primer of life because it contains God's *word of life*: "Lord, to whom shall we turn? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:69). God has spoken to us once and for all, in His single Word, His only Son, and He has no more to say (St. John of the Cross).

Holy reading is not a question of how much we cover but of our carefulness in reading. More important still is that we then think about what we read. In our days, the multiplicity of spiritual books offers the temptation to read without much thought, to pass from one book to the next, gaining little or nothing.

If practically all religious Rules prescribe a special effort in Lenten reading, they find their justification, if it be needed, in this closing admonition of the preface. Scripture must be the foundation of any spiritual life.

Meditation, then, will be nothing but thinking and loving prompted by what we read. But meditation cannot stop there. It must lead to action. That we believe in God need not be argued. But this belief must be a living and lived belief, must lead to our thinking of God and to the expression in our actions of the convictions which our reading has aroused in us.

Life is not a series of disconnected events. It is an unbroken chain of tasks, opportunities, activities, and graces, and each single one of them will contribute to our perfection. From the moments of our life we can weave either a pattern of poor patchwork of odds and ends according to our fancy or a pattern after the model which has been given us by Christ. The materials lie around everywhere. The Bible is easily accessible. We only have to seize the grace of the moment and use it.

The intellect certainly has its part in the fruits of reading but the immediate goal remains the development of devotion and charity, and there can be no better program for Lent. "There where charity goes together with the intellect and devotion with knowledge, we will progress with certainty, without limit, because we progress towards eternity" (St. Bernard, Serm. IV, Nov., 2). As far as we are concerned, that eternity of which St. Bernard speaks will come in its time. But we have to see to it now that our Lent lived in the light of this ancient preface will make us ready for, and worthy of, that eternity to come. We prepare for both holy Easter and eternity with the joy of spiritual longing (St. Benedict, Holy Rule, ch. 49).

The Ash Wednesday preface was "prayed before us" that we may not only pray but live after it, first during Lent, then during the months and years which God still may grant us. Pope Pius XII passed to his reward only a few months ago. Each religious can use this Lent of 1959 to make one of his Holiness' last wishes come true: that each religious and each house will grow into, and become part of, the Church's school of sanctity.

The Convent Book Shelf

THE HOLY RULE: Notes on St. Benedict's Legislation for Monks. By Dom Hubert Van Zeller, O.S.B. Sheed & Ward, New York 3, 1958. Pp. 476. Cloth, \$7.50.

The spiritual inquisitiveness of religious, particularly of superiors, turns expectantly to the wisdom of experience as recorded in the writings of spiritual leaders or in books about them. In the book under review the various monastic and patristic sources for St. Benedict's Rule are drawn into the discussion, as well as the numerous commentaries of the Rule down through the centuries, beginning with St. Gregory's Second Book of Dialogs.

Such a wealth of practical wisdom is here presented in a very fluent, at times almost conversationally argumentative style, that the reader cannot but think along and thus easily gain an insight into the ideals and problems of religious life. Although the Holy Rule was written for monks in the cloister, in the course of time monastic activity branched out into almost all the fields in which religious of our day find themselves. Hence the application of religious principles covers a wide scope, as there was

need of adapting the original text of the Rule to fit later and modern conditions. One may justly be curious in searching out the application of the Rule to religious life in the modern world.

Frequently the reader will receive a thrill, or perhaps a jolt in conscience, as he passes from page to page. The sharply reasoned conclusions leave no loopholes through which a modern adapter may escape safely. A knowledge of Latin and French is required to understand some lines of this book. The reader may rest assured that as he proceeds he will realize a deeper sense of his religious ideals, and be given inspiration to improve his religious observance.

Basil Stegmann, O.S.B.
Fargo, North Dakota

THE WORD OF SALVATION. A Commentary on the Gospels by Albert Valensin, Joseph Huby, Alfred Durand, all of the Society of Jesus. Translated by John J. Heenan, S.J. The Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, Wis. 1957. Pp. 990. Cloth, \$14.00.

Our times are gradually arriving at the providential realization that Holy Scripture is one of the pro-

jections of Himself into the ages that Our Lord was talking about when He promised that He would be with His Church all days. In papal and theological writings, Catholics have always had evidence of the official Church teaching on the unlimited worth of the Bible. But it is only in recent times that the faithful and the clergy have actually tasted and experienced that the Lord is as sweet in His Word as He is in His Sacrament. There is a real renaissance afoot in matters of Scripture reading and study.

But the going is not easy; and many Catholics, while holding in theory to the preciousness of the Word of God, are frightened away from a steady diet of its meaty meaning by the very difficulty of the concepts and text. They need explanation; and this book goes far to meet that need.

The Word of Salvation is a thorough and solid section by section explanation of the Gospels of St. Luke and St. John. Written in French originally in 1927, and revised in 1941, it is the work of a learned team of biblical scholars.

A book such as this would be of invaluable help to Sisters desirous of deepening their spiritual life by drawing at the holiest and most abundant source. Every Gospel of the Church year with its explanation can be found in this and a preceding volume containing the commentary on the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark. Public and/or private reading of the appropriate sections in these volumes would surely lead the religious community to a more intelligent and loving participation in the Holy Sacrifice and to a lifting up of their hearts which is the necessary condition for the filling of those hearts with Christ and His grace.

Emeric A. Lawrence, O.S.B.
Collegeville, Minnesota

MY LAST BOOK. By James M. Gillis, C.S.P. Edited by Joseph McSorley, C.S.P. P. J. Kenedy and Sons, New York. 1958. Pp. 246. Cloth, \$3.95.

In the year between his being stricken with a cerebral spasm in Lent of 1956 and his going home to God on March 14, 1957, 81-year-old Paulist Father James M. Gillis looked back on fifty-six years as priest, teacher, lecturer, and editor of *The Catholic World* (1922-1948). The author of nine books, Father Gillis took fresh stock of the values he held inviolable, set them down from day to day in what he knew to be *My Last Book*.

Offering his readers these "Thoughts" or "Musings" from July through January, his next-to-final months on earth, Father Gillis hoped "that these informal jottings may serve the purpose of some readers who are looking not for a set of carefully elaborated meditations but for hints and suggestions." Unpolished by editorial interference, his reflections are precious, if rough-cut, gems of Christian philosophy and applied theology. His opening thoughts are abandonment to God's Will in his own situation and acceptance of his cross, while the closing pages record his comments on faith as a virtue and "our abode with Him."

Frequent references to Holy Scripture, *The Imitation of Christ*, and scores of spiritual and classical works (over fifty are listed at book's end) enrich and corroborate the author's personal experience of truth. He reaffirms his response to the basic realities — the presence of God, the divinity of Christ, the importance of the Sacraments and prayer, the natural moral virtues, the power of charity, the need for sincerity in all things.

Well worth reading, but on the author's own terms.

S.A.



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who are gone before us
with the sign + of faith
and sleep in the sleep
of peace. [Canon of Mass]

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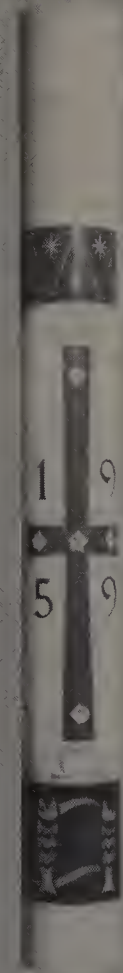
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